FRONT DESK

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

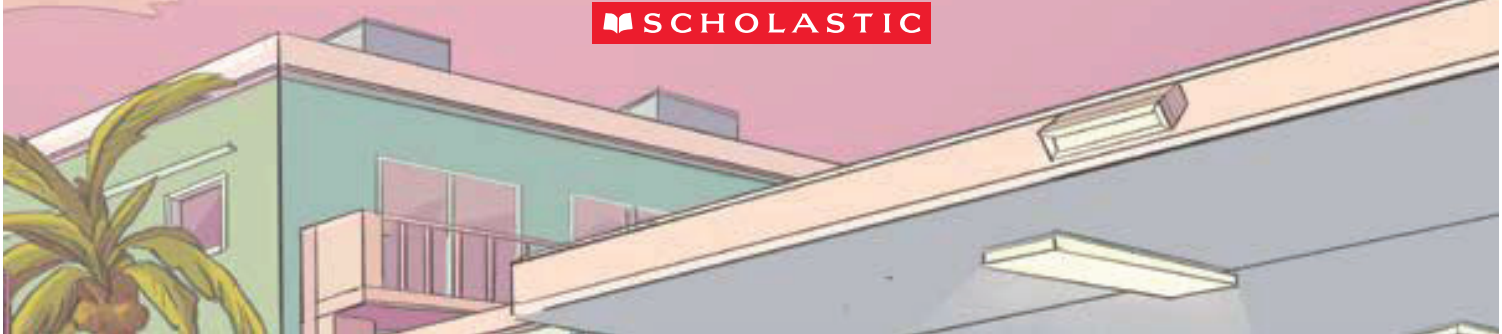
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To Eliot, Tilden,
and Nina, in loving memory
of my late grandfather, and
to my parents, who taught
me to dream

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LOS ANGELES, 1993.
THE SUMMER MY DAD GOT A JOB AS AN ASSISTANT FRY COOK–
WE MOVED OUT OF OUR CAR AND INTO A ONE-BEDROOM APARTMENT.


DAD BROUGHT HOME FRIED RICE EVERY NIGHT.
WHAT ARE THOSE BLISTERS ON YOUR ARM?
OH, HEH-HEH... JUST ALLERGIES, MIA.
THOSE ARE BURNS FROM THE WOK AT THE RESTAURANT WHERE HE WORKS.
MOM GOT A JOB THERE, TOO, AS A WAITRESS.
EVERYBODY LIKED HER AND SHE MADE GREAT TIPS.
THERE WAS NO ONE TO LOOK AFTER ME–
SO SHE CONVINCED HER BOSS TO LET ME COME TO THE RESTAURANT.


HER BOSS WAS WRINKLY AND REEKED OF GARLIC.
HE DIDN'T BELIEVE IN WASTING ANYTHING...
ESPECIALLY NOT FREE LABOR.
HEY, KID! THINK YOU CAN HANDLE WAITRESS-ING?
UH...
MY FIRST JOB! THERE WAS ONLY ONE PROBLEM...
YES, SIR!
I WAS NINE.
AS SOON AS THE DINNER RUSH STARTED—


CRAAASH
SORRY!
I WAS FIRED ON THE SPOT—
AND SO WAS MY MOTHER.

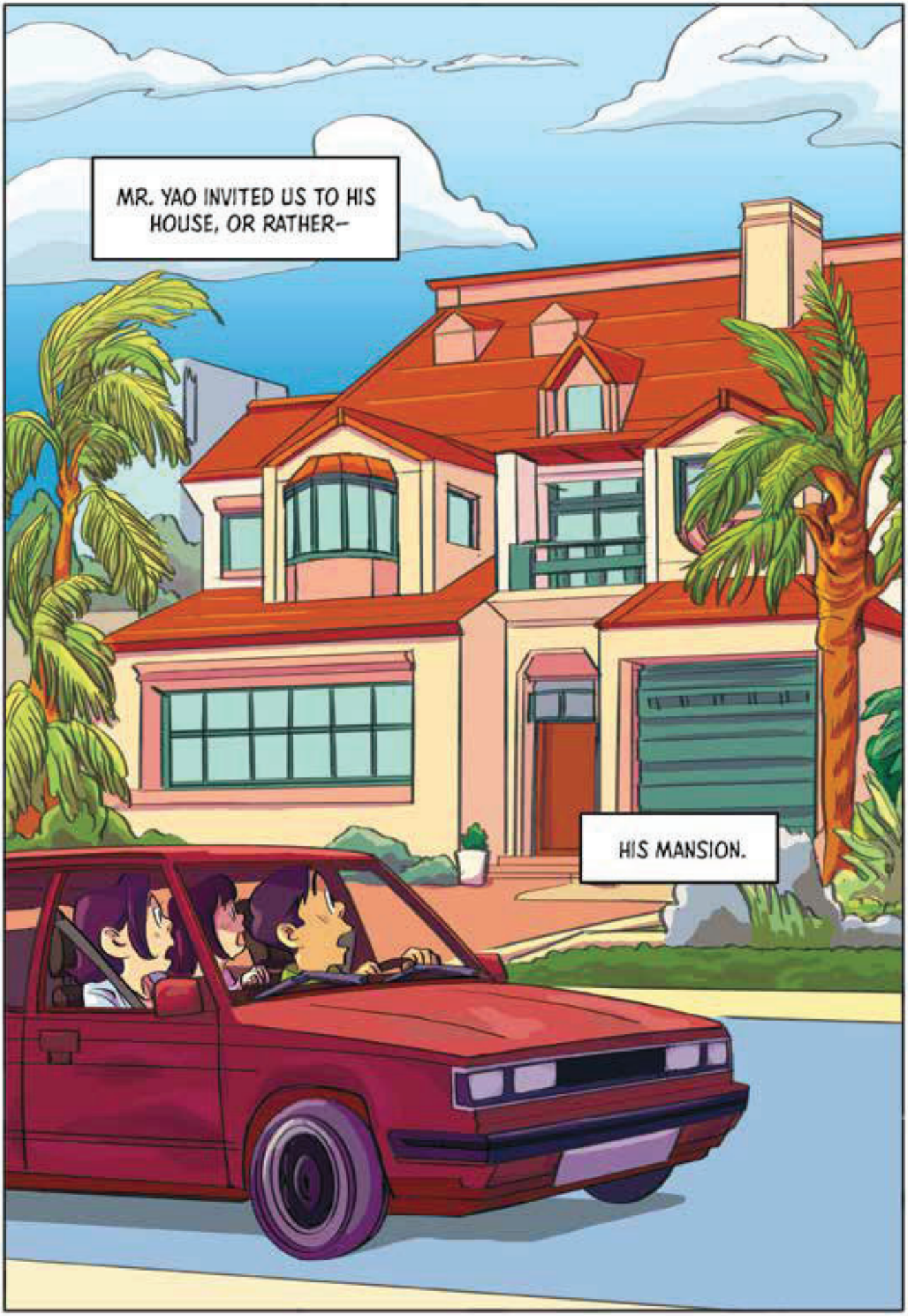

NONE OF MY COUSINS HAD EVER BEEN FIRED BEFORE.
BACK THEN, CHINA HAD A ONE-CHILD POLICY.
NONE OF US HAD SIBLINGS, SO WE WERE EACH OTHER'S SIBLINGS.
MIA, HEY! IT'S OK...
Click
IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT.
MOM... WHY DID WE COME HERE?
WHY DID WE COME TO AMERICA?


BECAUSE IT'S FREER HERE.
FREE? NOTHING IN AMERICA IS FREE.
EVERYTHING HERE IS SO EXPENSIVE!
ONE DAY YOU'LL UNDERSTAND.
BUT, MOM-


click
NOW GO TO SLEEP.
I MISS MY COUSINS.
I WONDER IF THEY MISS ME BACK.


AFTER WE WERE FIRED, MOM GOT SERIOUS ABOUT JOB HUNTING.
TIME TO GET BACK ON MY HORSE!
SHE BOUGHT EVERY CHINESE NEWSPAPER SHE COULD FIND.
SHE PORED OVER THE LISTINGS.
AH!


HIS NAME IS MICHAEL YAO... HE SAYS HE OWNS A SMALL MOTEL IN ANAHEIM!
HE'S LOOKING FOR AN EXPERIENCED MOTEL MANAGER.
BUT WE DON'T HAVE ANY EXPERIENCE RUNNING A MOTEL!
WE CAN STILL TRY.
THE JOB COMES WITH FREE BOARDING!
FREE RENT!
OUR RENT COST NEARLY ALL OF DAD'S SALARY.
CALLING YAO NOW!


MR. YAO INVITED US TO HIS HOUSE, OR RATHER–
HIS MANSION.